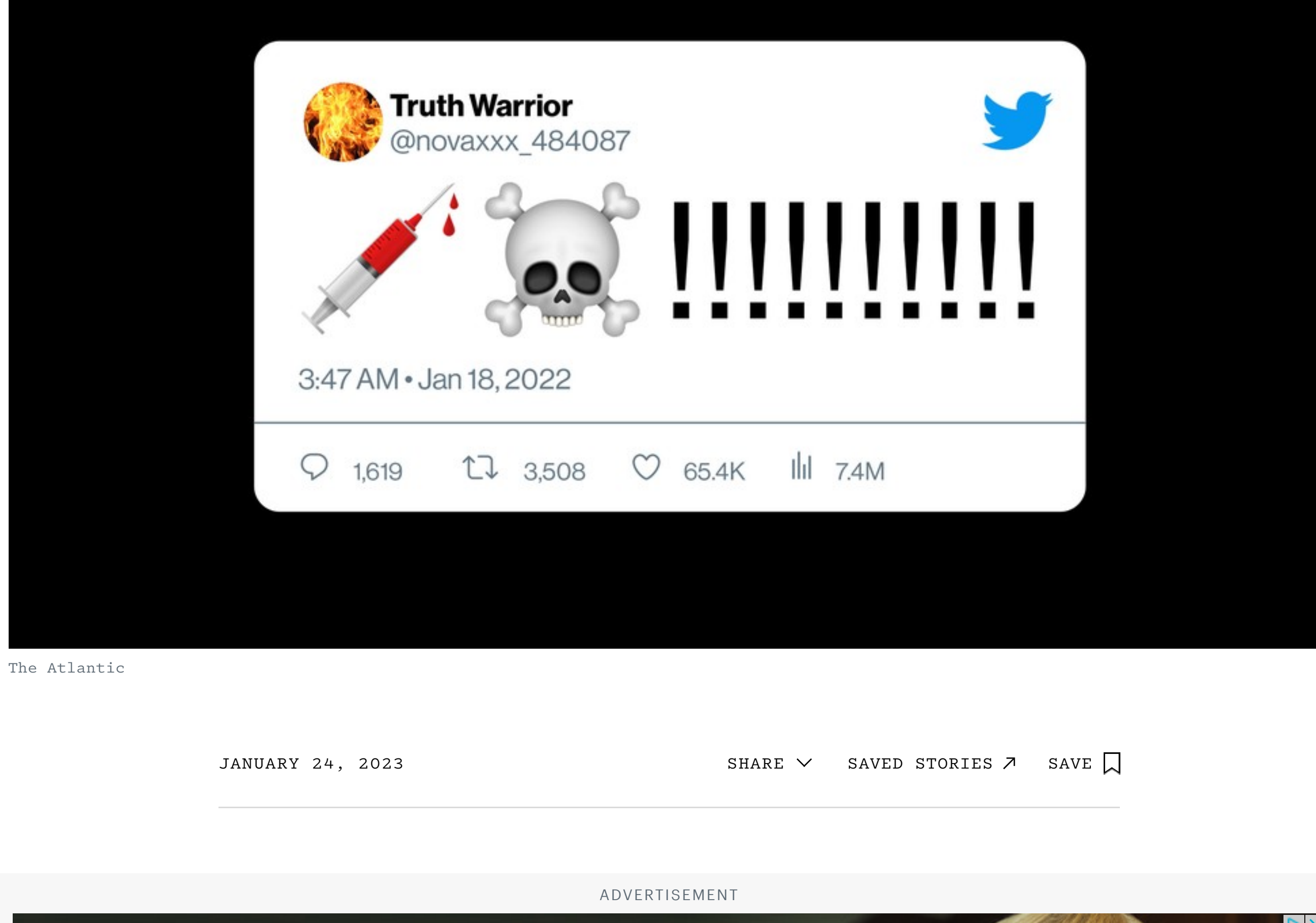


Twitter Has No Answers for #DiedSuddenly

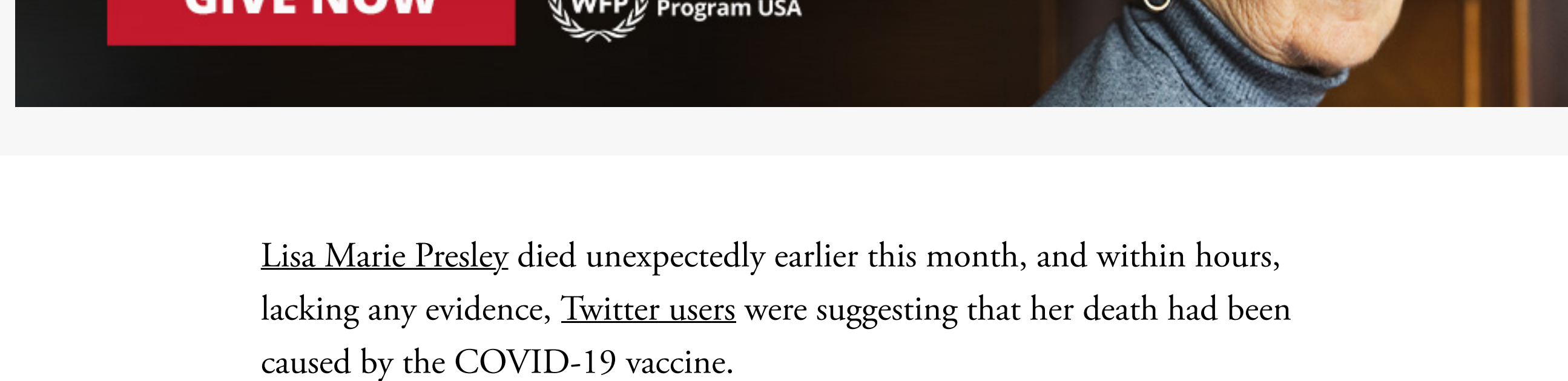
platforms that have no interest in shutting it down.

By Kaitlyn Tiffany



References

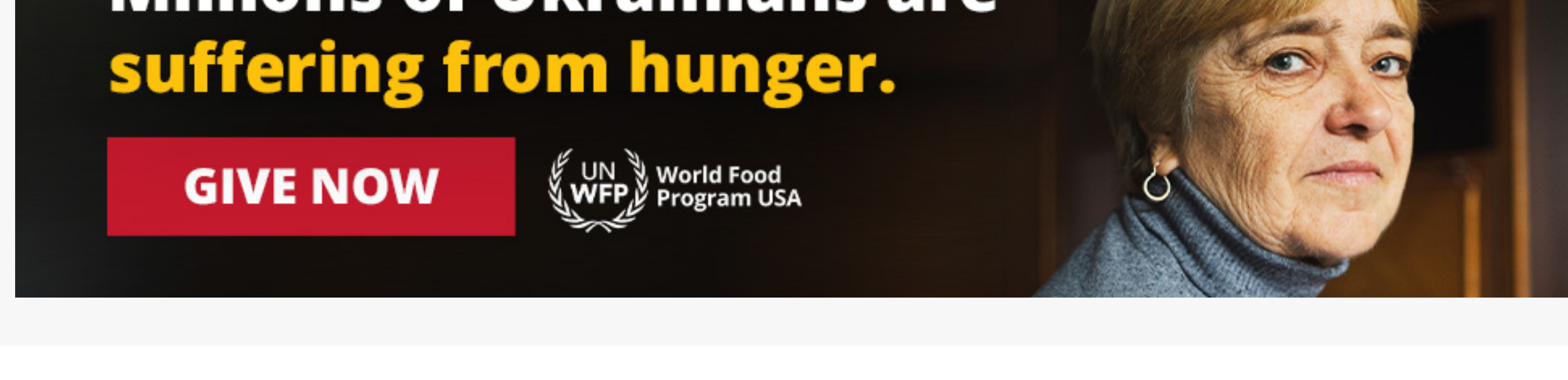
Program USA



The Twitter account @DiedSuddenly_, which has about 250,000 followers, also started tweeting about it immediately, using the hashtag #DiedSudden. Over the past several months, news stories about any kind of sudden death

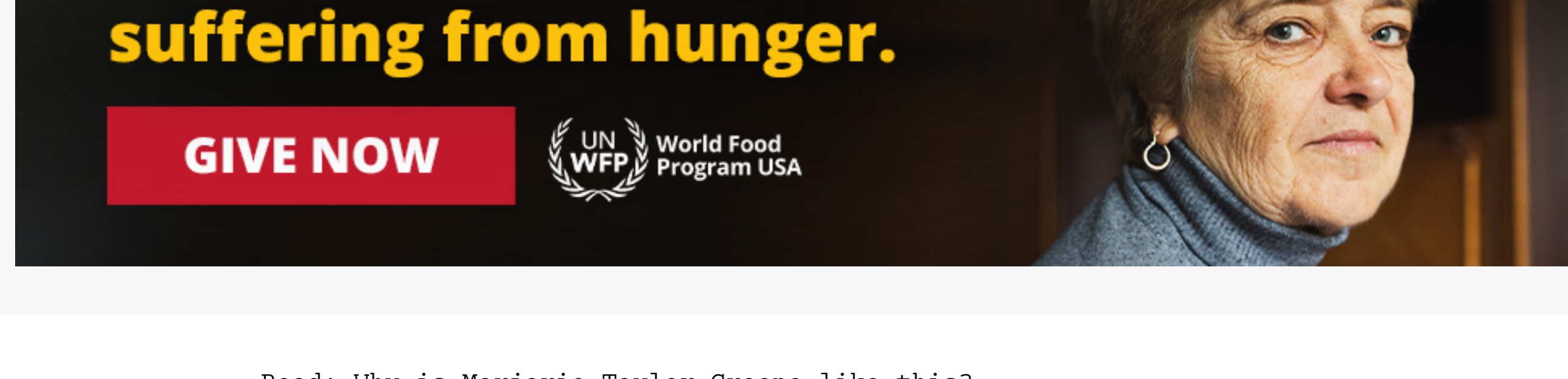
grave injury—including the death of the sports journalist Grant Wahl and the sudden collapse of the Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin—have been met with a similar reaction from anti-vaccine activists. Though most of the incidents had obvious explanations and almost certainly no connection to the vaccine, which has an extremely remote risk of causing heart inflammation—much smaller than the risk from COVID-19 itself—the idea that the shots are causing mass death has been boosted by right-wing media figures and a handful of well-known professional athletes.

Paris



documentary film of a generation.” The hour-long movie has spread unchecked on Rumble, a moderation-averse video-streaming platform, and Twitter, which abandoned its COVID-misinformation policy two days after the film premiered in November. It puts forth the familiar conspiracy theory that the vaccines were engineered as a form of population control, illustrated by stomach-turning footage of funeral directors and embalmers removing “white fibrous clots” that “look like calamari” from the corpses of people who have purportedly been vaccinated against COVID-19. (There are also some clips of Lee Harvey Oswald and the moon landing, for unclear reasons.) *Died Suddenly* has been viewed nearly 20 million times and cheered on by far

right personalities such as [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#) and [Candace Owens](#). It was released by the Stew Peters Network, whose other videos on Rumble have titles like “Obama Formed Shadow Government BEFORE Plandemic” and “AIRPORTS SHUT DOWN FOR EVERYONE BUT JEWS!” And its creators are already asking for donations to fund a sequel, *Died Suddenly 2*, which promises to explore “deeper rabbit holes.” (Nicholas Stumphauzer, one of the film’s directors, did not respond to questions, other than to say that the production team was motivated by a desire to “stop the globalist death cult.”)



it and capture further attention. What's more, there

basically unmoderated mainstream social-media platform that can put it in front of hundreds of millions of users—some of whom will [make fun of it](#), but others of whom will start to see something unsettling and credible in its repetitions.

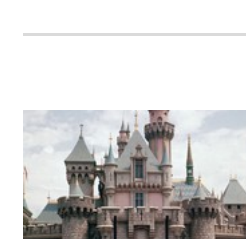
has a blue checkmark next to it—a symbol that used to indicate some kind of trustworthiness but now indicates a willingness to pay a monthly fee. When @DiedSuddenly_ first uploaded the movie in full on Twitter, it was labeled as misleading, in accordance with the COVID-19-misinformation policies that were then in place on the site. But this label was soon removed, on November 23, the same day that Twitter stopped enforcing rules about COVID-19 misinformation—including posts stating that the vaccines intentionally cause mass death.

Twitter, like many platforms, has spent the past decade refining its content-moderation policies. Now it is randomly throwing them out. Jing Zeng, a researcher at the University of Zurich, began her [work on Twitter and conspiracy theories](#) in 2018, and she noted a major transformation in response to the pandemic and the rise of QAnon. “Especially since the start of COVID, Twitter had been active in deplatforming conspiracy-theory-related accounts,” she told me. A lot of conspiracy theorists moved to fringe sites where they had trouble rebuilding the huge audiences they’d had on Twitter. But now their time in the desert may be over. “Twitter under Elon Musk has been giving signals to the communities of conspiracy theorists that Twitter’s door might be open to them again,” Zeng said.

How Negativity Can Kill a



Relationship
JOHN TIERNEY AND R
BAUMEISTER



Opening Day at Disneyland
Pl. 5, F. 1955



ALAN TAYLOR

In just a few months, the #DiedSuddenly meme has become a presence on

most major social platforms, including Instagram and Facebook. At the end of 2022, researchers and reporters pointed to large Facebook groups dedicated to “Died Suddenly News.” Last week, I was able to join a community that was created in October and had more than 34,000 members. They referred to themselves as “pure bloods” and to vaccines as “cookies” or “cupcakes,” and alternated between mourning “sudden deaths” and gloating about them. And they had been careful to evade detection by Facebook’s automated content-moderation systems: Group administrators asked them to write about “de@ths and injury from the c@v@d s@ts” and “disguise ALL words that have any medical meaning.” (Facebook removed the group after I inquired about it.)

But “died suddenly” thrives on Twitter. Tweets referencing news stories about

unexpected deaths can be flooded with replies trumpeting the conspiracy theory, which go unmoderated. It's a radical change from the earlier years of the pandemic, during which Twitter implemented new policies against health misinformation and updated them regularly, gradually finessing the wording and clarifying how the company assessed misleading information. These policies and the tactics used to enforce them tightened as the pandemic went on. According to a [transparency report](#) the company published in July 2022, Twitter suspended significantly more accounts and removed far more content during the vaccine rollout than during the earliest months of the pandemic, when various groups first expressed concern about dangerous misinformation spreading online.

This isn't to say that Twitter's policies were perfect. Journalists, politicians, and medical experts all had issues with how the site moderated content in the pandemic's first two years. But from 2020 on, parties who were interested in

the challenges of moderating health information were able to have a fairly nuanced debate about how well Twitter was doing with this super-convoluted task, and how it might improve. In 2020, a sea-change year for content moderation across the social web, major platforms were pushed by activists,

moderation across the social web, major platforms were pushed by activists, politicians, and regular users to do more than they had ever done before. The year saw the proliferation of election disinformation and Donald Trump's leadership of a violent, anti-democracy meme army, as well as nationwide protests in support of social justice whose reach extended to the practices of internet companies. And there was a backlash in response: Aggrieved right-wing influencers bemoaned the rise of censorship and the end of free speech; commentators with bad opinions about vaccines or other public-health

measures got **booted off Twitter** and wound up on Substack, where they talked about getting booted off Twitter.

Now we're in a reactionary moment in the history of content moderation. The

alt-tech ecosystem expanded with the launch of Trumps Truth Social and the return of Parler; the *Died Suddenly* filmmakers were recently interviewed for a program exclusive to Frank, the supposed free speech platform created by the MyPillow founder and conspiracy-theory promoter Mike Lindell. Some of the alt-tech platforms, including Rumble, saw significant growth by openly marketing themselves as anti-moderation. As I wrote at the end of last year, Rumble grew from 1 million monthly average users in 2020 to 36 million in the third quarter of 2021. The platform used to market itself as a “clean”

alternative to YouTube, but its CEO now talks about its aversion to “cancel culture” and its goal of “restoring” the internet “to its roots” by eliminating content guidelines.

And Twitter is backsliding, led by a CEO who has delighted in [sharing company documents with critics](#) who held the old COVID-19 policies in disdain. In the “Died Suddenly” Facebook group I joined, commenters praised Musk’s version of the site. “Sign up for Twitter,” one wrote. Those

Earlier in the pandemic, researchers like Zeng were concerned about “dark platforms” such as 8kun or Gab, and how their wacky, dangerous ideas about

COVID-19 could leach onto mainstream platforms. But now? The difference between alt and mainstream is getting slimmer.